DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 106 RC 023 408

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TITLE Empowering Children To Change.
PUB DATE 2002-03-00
NOTE 7p.; In: No Child Left Behind: The Vital Role of Rural Schools. Annual National Conference Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (22nd, Reno, NV, March 7-9, 2002); see RC 023 405.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Modification; *Behavior Problems; *Early Intervention; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Education; *Emotional Problems; *High Risk Students; Individualized Education Programs; Prevention; Program Descriptions; Rural Education; *Special Needs Students
IDENTIFIERS Idaho (Southeast)

ABSTRACT

Elementary Options (EO) is a behavior support program in rural southeast Idaho for students in grades K-5 with emotional or behavioral difficulties. Instead of imposing curriculum or classroom strategies, EO works in conjunction with the Department of Health and Welfare to offer a systematic approach to managing problem behaviors with existing school personnel. Maintaining students in general education environments is its strongest goal. Program participation is triggered when the teacher requests support and submits observations and data. Additional information determines the appropriate level of service, after which intervention and monitoring begin. The program uses a five-step plan of escalating levels of support. The first four levels of support are delivered in the student's regular school setting and consist of classroom support, counseling, coaching and tracking, and service learning, respectively. The fifth level is placement in a half-day alternative classroom. The student's counselor, parents, principal, general education teacher, observer, coach, special education teacher, and the EO coordinator meet regularly to discuss the student's behavior and ongoing assessment. Since September 2000, students demonstrated average monthly increases of 5 percent in their ability to use independent learning behaviors, 2 percent in social skills, and 6 percent in ability to meet target academic and social behaviors. School discipline incidents dropped from 1.6 per student per month to 0.3. (TD)

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Empowering Children To Change

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EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO CHANGE

Elementary Options, a behavior support program for students K-5 with emotional and/or behavioral difficulties, was created to address the unique needs present in our rural setting. Jefferson County School District #251 is located in southeast Idaho and serves 4,000 students, half of which are in elementary school. The goal of our program is to work with staff members within each school to help at-risk students acquire skills that will help them to function in school with greater success.

Unlike many programs, *Elementary Options* does not impose curriculum or dictate classroom strategies, nor does it bear the entire responsibility for improving the functioning of the child. Rather, it functions as a resource. It offers a systematic approach to managing problem behaviors that capitalizes on the strategic use of existing school personnel. *Elementary Options* works in conjunction with the Department of Health and Welfare to provide these services.

Why Implement a Behavior Intervention Program at the Elementary Level?

When determining the need for an elementary behavior intervention program, several ideas were presented:

1. We have some severe behavior problems in our elementary schools and few resources to provide effective intervention.
2. Early intervention at the elementary level is important in the prevention of problems at the junior high and high school levels.
3. Children need behavioral supports delivered in a consistent manner by well-trained staff to be able to change their behaviors.
4. It is advantageous to the district to provide effective, behavioral intervention than to assume the costs for residential placement for even one child with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

When our district implemented a student data management system (SASI is the program we use), and the State of Idaho asked for yearly reporting of data regarding student behavior, it became readily apparent that an increasing number of students at the elementary level had behavioral difficulties. Data showed us that a small number of students were responsible for a large number of the disciplinary incidents. Statistically, about 2% of our student population were responsible for 30% of the disciplinary incidents. According to the "Kids Count Statistics," 30% of the children born in our county from 1994 to 1996 are at educational risk; and these children are now school age. Because of these statistics combined with principal reports, teacher frustration, and parental concerns, the need for a behavioral treatment program became imperative.

Starting the *Elementary Options* Program

In the spring of 2000 it became increasingly evident that an effective program to change the behavior of challenging students was needed in our district. Three questions that needed to be answered were identified, including:

1. What are the key elements of an effective, elementary behavior program?
2. What resources will be needed to start a program?

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3. Are there funding sources available?

To identify the elements of an effective program we visited other day treatment programs in our area and met in small group planning sessions. The strongest factor identified was the need for personnel who were ready, willing, and able to work with children demonstrating challenging behaviors. The second factor we identified as critical was keeping students in their "home" classroom for at least part of the school day. Several area programs that used a full day, "pullout" model for behavior intervention found it difficult to reintegrate the students into the regular classroom because their teachers did not want them to come back. In addition, students in a full-day, pullout model had few opportunities to practice appropriate behavior in a typical classroom environment.

Resources needed were initially identified as a teacher, an aide, materials, and a classroom. Costs were estimated at $40,000 for a teacher; $5,000 for a part-time aide, and $1,000 for materials. The district would provide the classroom at an elementary school located midway through the district, as well as, the busing needed to bring students to the *Elementary Options* classroom for part of a day. Costs we underestimated included training costs for personnel, mileage costs for the teacher to visit students in their "home" classrooms and to attend meetings for students in the referral process, additional material and supply costs, and equipment costs such as a computer for the classroom. We did, however, begin the program with $46,000 and very successfully got it off the ground.

Funding sources proved to be the most difficult part. Our school district has one of the lowest tax bases in a state that is already considered by many to "underfund" education. So, district funding was not a possibility. Health and Welfare funded several day treatment programs in larger districts to the south of us, but initially turned us down for funding. The option remaining was a competitive grant submitted to the state for Safe and Drug Free School (SDFS) funds. Our grant was approved for the full $46,000 for one year of funding. In May, Health and Welfare offered $5,600 to offset the cost of an additional aide.

During the second year of the program funding sources changed and grew. We again applied for and received a competitive SFDS grant with a decreased amount of $39,500. We also applied to Health and Welfare for funding under the Idaho Children's Mental Health Act and received $35,000. With the additional funds we added a stipend to the Elementary Options teacher's salary, paid for a portion of a school social worker's salary, expanded the program to the middle school, and hired an additional aide for the middle school. We also used federal special education (VI-B) funds to purchase materials and pay for training and mileage costs for the children in the program who were identified as children with disabilities.

The secret to success for the *Elementary Options* program is our coordinator/teacher. Without a highly trained, motivated, and exceptional individual, effective day treatment is not possible, no matter how little or great the funding sources. Jayetta Rasmussen is trained and certified in Idaho as a teacher and as a school psychologist. Mrs. Rasmussen uses her many skills and problem solving abilities to help children change their behavior, support teachers in the classroom with difficult students, and meet with Student Assistance Teams to identify and assist students with "budding" behavior difficulties. Of all our resources, she is the greatest.

Elementary Options Design

We designed a five-step plan built on the idea of providing accumulating and escalating levels of support. This approach helped us determine and provide assistance that enabled students with emotional and or behavioral problems to function at 80% compliance 80% of the time. The *Elementary Options* model allowed us to justly hold these students accountable for their behavior by providing support systems that enabled them to function in school in a healthier manner.

Behavior supports extend help from the regular classroom to placement in a half-day alternative classroom. The first four levels of support are delivered in the student's regular school setting. Each level has a specific emphasis and produces a natural flow of information that enables the SAT/IEP to make data based decisions. It distributes and expedites the process of gathering data and thereby simplifies the process of conducting FBAs, designing interventions, writing behavior plans, and analyzing student progress.

The *Elementary Options* model also allows schools to take full advantage of the staff and faculty perks individual to their setting. Faculty and staff perks are powerful resources because they empower the school to

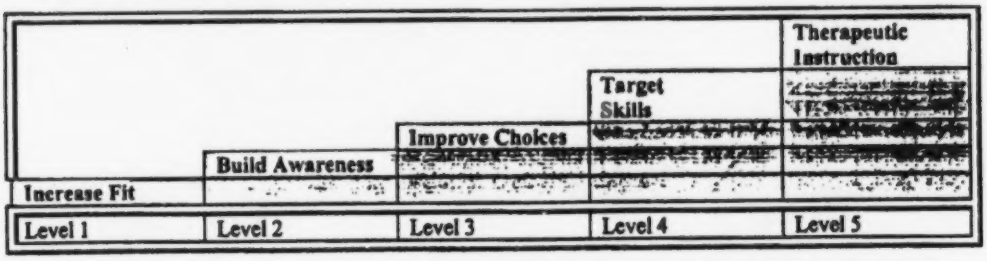
personalize and enrich behavior interventions. Interventions that are personalized to fit the student increase the likelihood that the tide of misbehavior can be reversed. They ignite a flow of positive experiences that helps students rewrite problematic perceptions, construct healthy relationships, and devote more energy toward learning.

Elementary Options Model

Step One
Teacher initiates problem solving by requesting support and submitting observations and data.

Step Two
SAT/IEP gathers additional information and determines appropriate level of service.

Step Three
Intervention and monitoring services begin.



Accumulating and Escalating Services

Type of Support
Level 5 - 1/2 Day Placement *Social Skills *Problem solving *Management of Emotions *Academic Enrichment *Behavior Reinforcement *Communicate With Parents/School.
Level 4 - Service Learning *Identify Target Skills *Contract With Principal *Report Performance *Write School Behavior Plan
Level 3 - Coaching & Tracking Sheet *Daily Coaching *Tracking Sheet *School Case Manager Conduct FBA
Level 2 - Counseling Configuration Of: *School Counselor *School Psychologist *School Companion *District Social Worker
Level 1 - Classroom Support *Increase Interaction with Peers *Ensure Academic Fit *Establish Emotional Vents *Class Job

Elementary Options Team Member Roles

One of the strengths of the Elementary Options model is the ability to bring together the expertise and problem solving ability of a diverse group of people in each school. Each member brings information about success and failures in changing a student's behavior and on-going assessment information. Team meetings last from ten minutes to an hour depending on the purpose of the meeting. Team member roles are illustrated below:

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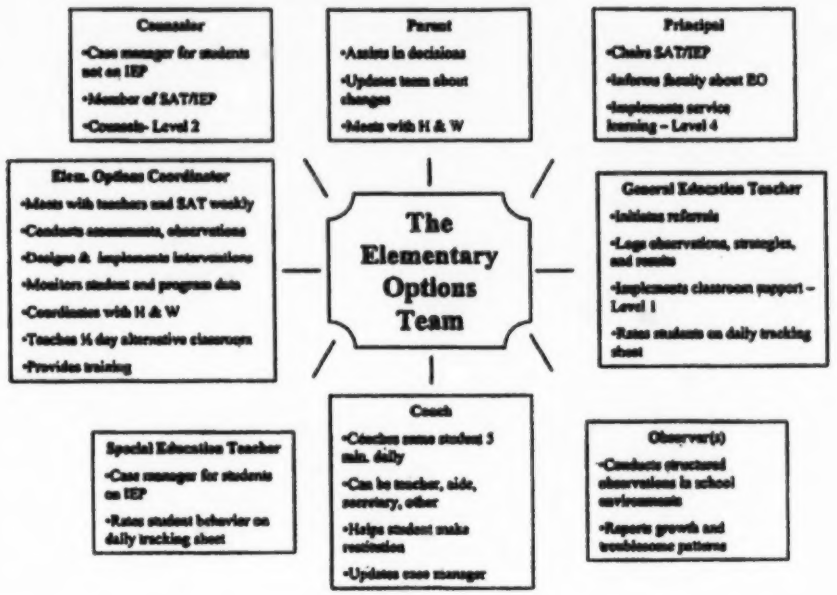
Counselor
•Case manager for students not on IEP
•Member of SAT/IEP
•Counsels- Level 2
Parent
•Assists in decisions
•Updates team about changes
•Meets with H & W
Principal
•Chairs SAT/IEP
•Informs faculty about EO
•Implements service learning – Level 4
Elem. Options Coordinator
•Meets with teachers and SAT weekly
•Conducts assessments, observations
•Designs & implements interventions
•Monitors student and program data
•Coordinates with H & W
•Teaches ½ day alternative classroom
•Provides training
The Elementary Options Team
General Education Teacher
•Initiates referrals
•Logs observations, strengths, and needs
•Implements classroom support – Level 1
•Rates students on daily tracking sheet
Special Education Teacher
•Case manager for students on IEP
•Rates student behavior on daily tracking sheet
Coach
•Coaches same student 5 min. daily
•Can be teacher, aide, secretary, other
•Helps student make restitution
•Updates case manager
Observer(s)
•Conducts structured observations in school environments
•Reports growth and troublesome patterns

Program Data

Since September of 2000, 56 students have received emotional and or behavioral support through *Elementary Options*. This includes both students with and without IEPs, as well as, those who do and don't meet the Health and Welfare criteria for emotional disturbance. Data collected during the past year and one-half indicates that our program has had a positive impact on individual students, as well as, at the building level. Program results were determined from regular classroom teacher ratings in three to four areas depending on the level of support a student was receiving. The table below shows numbers of students receiving support on each of the five levels and students who have reduced their need for support by moving to levels of decreasing support.

	New Students 9/2000 - 5/2001	New Students 9/2001 - 12/2001
Level of Support Provided		
Consultation Only	21	8
Levels 1-2	N/A	11
Levels 3-4	N/A	5
Level 5	10	1
Reduction of Support		
Reduction of support by 1 or more levels.	2	7
Full transition from Level 5 alternative placement.	2	2
Partial transition from Level 5 alternative placement	0	4

Students demonstrated a five- percent average monthly increase in their ability to use independent learning behaviors. (Levels 1-5). The average monthly increase in social skills was two percent. (Levels 1-5). Data from students on a daily tracking plan (Levels 3-5) showed an average monthly increase of six percent in their ability to meet their target academic and social behaviors. A record of school discipline incidents for the past year and one-half shows that before students entered the program they averaged 1.60 class three incidents per month. After *Elementary Options* that average dropped to .31 incidents per student per month.

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The Future of the Elementary Options Program

Because of the proven success of *Elementary Options* the desire for the program is secure. Changes have evolved in the program in the delivery of services, funding sources, and the role of the coordinator/teacher. These will continue to evolve as our experience grows in changing children's behavior.

The delivery of services has become stronger in the general education environments and has reinforced our initial practice of keeping students in their regular classrooms for at least part of the school day. Additionally, the continuum of services has expanded to include more steps between initial referral and placement in *Elementary Options*. Maintaining students in general education environments and returning students to full time placement in general education environments is our strongest goal. Building supports in our elementary schools will continue to grow and will most likely include increased training for classroom teachers, better problem solving and interventions at pre-referral meetings, increased school "service" projects for troubled students, and increased use of existing school personnel to act as coaches and mentors for children with behavior difficulties. We expect each of these trends to continue. Also, the future will give us a better ability to intervene with students at an earlier age and stage to avoid behavior patterns that are so ingrained that all of our resources must be marshaled.

Funding sources will continue to be somewhat unstable. We intend to again apply for a SDFS competitive grant with a decreased request, apply for a Health and Welfare contract under the Idaho Children's Mental Health Act with an increased request, and use federal special education (VI-B) funds for aides and materials for those children who have IEPs.

The role of the coordinator/teacher has greatly changed from an emphasis on instruction and treatment for students in a pullout setting, to an emphasis on consultation, problem solving, behavior monitoring, and a liaison with Health and Welfare personnel. The coordinator/teacher will continue to be the success of the program. *Elementary Options* is a program that is essential to the well being of students, teachers, and patrons in Jefferson School District #251.

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